

Appropriations Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
*H.B. 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and
Making Appropriations Therefor*
Early Care and Education Appropriations
February 23, 2023

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity.

Through CWEALF's Legal Education Program, we provide information, education, referrals, and bilingual advocacy to the Connecticut community to ensure that all individuals in our state have access to legal justice. The majority of CWEALF's clients are low-income women with at least one dependent who earn incomes less than \$29,000 per year.

The COVID-19 crisis threatened the collapse of an already fragile system of child care in our state. During the pandemic, 3 in 4 private childcare providers closed their doors. The impact of COVID-19 on the child care sector not only negatively affects parents of young children in need of care, but also child care workers and business owners in need of work and reliable income to support their own families. In an industry where 92% of businesses are owned by and the majority of the workforce are women, the wellbeing of the child care sector correlates to women's economic security as a whole.¹

Historically, child care is a feminized and undervalued profession which has led to lower pay for women, specifically women of color, that perpetuates the gender wage gap and threatens women's economic security. Additional support and value of the contributions of women is critical to strengthen the child care sector, as well as the state's economy overall.

Access to affordable and quality child care is essential to support Connecticut's workforce; however, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicated that 44% of Connecticut's population lived in a "child care desert," defined as an area with "little or no access to quality child care."²

¹ Essential Equity: Women, COVID-19 and Rebuilding CT. 2021. Retrieved from:
<https://womenandgirls.ctdata.org/docs/Essential%20Equity%20Women%20Covid-19%20and%20Rebuilding%20CT.pdf>

² See note 1

Lack of access to child care is compounded by issues with affordability. Research in Connecticut depicts that only 1 in 20 families of color can afford high quality child care compared to 1 in 5 families in the overall population.³ When families do not have access to the affordable and reliable childcare that they need, women are more likely to bear the burden of caregiving responsibilities: during the pandemic, 76% female parents reported needing to stay home and not work due to their child care situation compared to 24% of male parents.⁴

While Connecticut's Care4Kids program supports low to moderate income families across the state pay for child care costs, the program pays providers too little and serves a fraction of families who are unable to afford child care. The Governor's proposal to add \$14.2 million and \$53 million to the Care4Kids program is necessary but insufficient. While it is important that Care4Kids certificates keep up with inflation in child care costs, this budget assumes that 2,000 fewer children will receive the subsidy at a time when families are struggling more than ever with the costs of child care. Parents and providers deserve a budget that both raises the value of Care4Kids certificates and serves more families.

Early educators and child care workers are among the lowest paid workers in today's economy and they need greater investments in this year's budget to increase their wages. The average wage for a child care worker is \$14.97 and for a preschool teacher it is \$15.18. Self employed family child care providers, who typically work longer hours, average less than \$8.50 - all of which are far below what is needed to stay financially afloat and meet basic needs in Connecticut.

The Governor's proposed budget for PreK-12 public schools also falls short of what is needed and we support the calls of other advocates on legislators to, at a minimum, fully fund the ECS formula now and prioritize equitable funding for districts that serve students who are low-income, English Language Learners and students of color.

Connecticut is at a crossroads: our state currently faces a multi billion dollar surplus and an overflowing Rainy Day Fund. Our wealthiest corporations and residents continue to prosper as inequities deepen and communities across the state pay the price of disinvestment in our child care system and preK-12 public schools. We urge leaders to act boldly this session by fully funding our public schools to guarantee the highest quality public education for every student and transforming the state's child care system.

³ Ibid

⁴ CTDATA . (2022).